

Advice and Information for Child Graduates of the Bicycle Riding School

Congratulations to the recent graduate for learning to ride a bicycle! We hope that she/he will have a lifetime of joy from biking, while maybe helping there to be one less car!

Practicing - Open Space & Bike Path

We recommend doing more practice in a paved open space to get really solid and steady before venturing on to something like a bike path or sidewalk, which takes more control and precision. Look for open spaces in your community to practice like paved school yards, empty parking lots, basketball or tennis courts, or possibly quiet streets (with adult supervision, of course).

Before heading onto a bike path, your rider should be able to:

- Reliably start on their own without swerving too much
- Ride relatively straight
- Stop reliably, in a controlled manner, both on command and being able to make their own decision about needing to stop if too close to something
- Look back over the left shoulder while staying reasonably straight without swerving much

When the rider is steady enough for a bike path, look on the Resources page of our website for our handout *Pointers for Riding on a Bike Path*, if you didn't get a copy at graduation. To see a list of bike paths in Massachusetts, visit TrailMap.MAPC.org and unselect all filters except "Paved Paths".

If you/your child are riding on a sidewalk, use extreme caution. In fact, we don't really recommend it. Keep in mind that sidewalks are meant for the speed of walking and that cars frequently cross sidewalks to enter/exit driveways and parking lots without looking for a person moving at the speed of a bicycle. People walking on sidewalks should not have to worry about a bike swerving or hitting them. If riding on sidewalks, give people walking lots of space or just stop. And, always have adult supervision.

Buying a Bike - Fit, Considerations, Where to Buy

When buying a bike, you want to ensure that it is not too big or too small for the rider and that the riding position is comfortable. For a point of reference, you can look at the specifications for the bike used during bike school by looking in the *Equipment* section of our website. Note that many of our bikes have some sort of after-market modification - from a change of brake style to a stem riser to different handlebars. Don't let someone sell you a bike that is too big with the idea that "they will grow into it" - it is dangerous and very discouraging to ride a bike that is too big, especially for a new rider.

Key Bike Fit Elements:

Wheel Size: Kids bikes are firstly categorized by wheel size; the standard sizes are 12", 16", 20", and 24" (26" and 700c wheels are considered adult bikes but are for anyone ~ 5'2"+).

Frame Size: With each wheel size, the size of the frame varies. So there may be a 20" bike with a smaller frame that fits your rider well and another 20" bike with a larger frame that's too big.

Reach to Ground & Seat Height: When the rider sits on the bike, he/she should be able to reach the ground with the balls of the feet firmly on the ground. If the new rider is still really nervous or just learning, even flat feet are a good thing. If the rider can only reach with tip-toes, the bike is too big or the seat needs to go down (until they are a fully confident rider). As the rider becomes more confident, the seat can be raised, but keep the balls of the feet on the ground until the child learns to stand up to get off and start up without being seated. Remember you may need to raise the seat every few months as your child grows and improves!

Reach outward/lean: All of our bikes are set up to be very upright. With any bike, the rider should not be very stretched out and reaching far forward. Bikes vary in how much they have a rider leaning over. Mountain bikes and many kids bikes tend to be quite leaning over, which works for some riders but is challenging for many new riders.

Other Considerations:

Brakes: A kid's bike may have a coaster brake (which brakes when pedals are pushed backwards) and no handbrakes, one handbrake and a coaster brake, or two handbrakes and no coaster brake. It is rare to have 2 handbrakes and a coaster brake. To see if a bike has a coaster brake, push the pedals back. If they don't move backward very far, the bike has a coaster brake. We generally teach on bikes with two handbrakes and no coaster brake because it is easier to position the pedals. With a coaster brake, the child has to move the bike forward and hop along to position the pedal. Transitioning between the two can be challenging. Bikes with 16" wheels and smaller almost always have coaster brakes. Kids usually manage to get how to use a coaster brake, once they can ride, but if your kid is really struggling with it, it is possible to find a bike with no coaster brake, but it's usually more expensive.

Gears: Gears are helpful when going up a hill but are not necessary.

Bell & kickstand: These are often purchases that need to be made separately. A bell is fun and the kickstand helps the bike to be better taken care of, but neither is required.

Helmet: Helmets are a must - they are actually required by law for children 16 and under. You can get a helmet at a bike shop, sports store, or box store like Target.

Helmet fit: The helmet shouldn't squeeze the head too much or flop around. Ideally get a helmet that adjusts, so it can fit more snugly and grow with your child. It's most comfortable when the straps form a V under the ears.



Pads & gloves: It's up to you whether you want your rider to wear pads and gloves after they have learned with us. If they are still wobbly/apt to fall or really nervous, it is helpful. You can get these at a sports store, box store and some bike stores. They tend to run small, so make sure they fit before buying! We find that Bern pads aren't very comfortable.

Where to Buy a Bike

The most reliable place to get a bike is a local bike shop. They know what to look for and will help fit your child for a bike. But insist that your kid's balls of the feet be firmly down, even if they disagree, unless your child is very athletic and fearless, and knows how to stand up to get off and on. If looking at yard sales, online sales, or department stores, keep the above bike fitting information in mind. Wherever you get a bike, be sure the child sits on it first to check for sizing and ideally takes it for a test ride!